

MPO  
11 April 07

## INFORMATION PAPER

Subj: TATTOO POLICY CHANGE

1. Purpose. To address the most frequently asked questions and common misinterpretations of MARADMIN 198/07 - "Announcement of Changes to the Marine Corps Tattoo Policy."

### 2. Background

a. MARADMIN 198/07, released 19 Mar 07, announced the revised Marine Corps Tattoo Policy. Since release, the policy has received widespread press coverage and its content has been greatly scrutinized within the Marine Corps. Unfortunately, both the press and "rumor mill" have often widely misinterpreted the revised policy. Based strictly on the many questions this office - Manpower Military Policy Branch (MPO) - has received, it's clear that many Marines and commands are "reading into the policy" and initiating actions beyond the scope of the MARADMIN.

b. The previous tattoo policy contained in MCO P1020.34G, Marine Corps Uniform Regulations, prohibited tattoos on the head or neck, and tattoos that were prejudicial to good order, discipline and morale or brought discredit on the Marine Corps. MARADMIN 198/07 became effective 1 April 07 and updates the previous regulation by:

- (1) Prohibiting sleeve tattoos;
- (2) Designating the Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs (DC M&RA) as the adjudicating authority on any tattoo issue involving retention and Special Duty Assignments; and
- (3) Providing specific examples as to which tattoos are considered prejudicial to good order, discipline and morale or bring discredit upon the Marine Corps.

3. Major Points. The following are the most commonly asked questions with answers provided by MPO on the revised policy:

**Q1:** Why was the tattoo policy changed?

**A1:** The Commandant directed a review of the tattoo policy due to concerns he had about the effect excessive tattoos were having on our traditional Corps values and our public image. See ALMAR 014/07 for additional details.

**Q2:** What is a sleeve tattoo?

**A2:** A sleeve tattoo, as defined in MARADMIN 198/07 is "a very large tattoo, or a collection of smaller tattoos, that covers or almost covers a person's entire arm or leg." A half or quarter sleeve tattoo is defined as, "a very large tattoo, or a collection of smaller tattoos that covers, or almost covers, the entire portion of an arm or leg above or below the elbow or knee."

**Q3:** Are all tattoos visible in PT gear prohibited?

**A3:** No. Only sleeve tattoos visible in PT gear are now prohibited.

Subj: TATTOO POLICY CHANGE

**Q4:** Do I need to document every visible (in PT gear) tattoo on a Marine for grandfathering?

**A4:** No. Only sleeve tattoos as defined in MARADMIN 198/07 require grandfathering. Individual tattoos that meet the criteria as established in MCO P1020.34G and MARADMIN 198/07 do not require grandfathering or documentation. For example, if a Marine has an Eagle, Globe and Anchor on the middle of their forearm and "Semper Paratus" on the underside of that same forearm, that tattoo is within regulations and does not need to be documented.

**Q5:** Is the page 11 entry punitive?

**A5:** No. The page 11 entry grandfathering a Marine's sleeve tattoo(s) is intended to protect the Marine by documenting the fact that the Marine had that tattoo prior to 1 Apr 07.

**Q6:** What should the page 11 entry state?

**A6:** As specifically stated in MARADMIN 198/07, para 3, the page 11 entry will include "...a measurement(s) of the size in inches and of the location(s) on the body and the date the tattoo(s) was documented. The Marine will sign the page 11 entry verifying the information is correct." No other information is required. Additionally, a photograph of the sleeve tattoo(s) will be physically attached to the page 11. There are no specific requirements for the photographs and they can be taken with any available camera - i.e. 35MM, Polaroid.

**Q7:** Can a Marine still obtain new tattoos on the arm(s) or leg(s)?

**A7:** Tattoos not specifically prohibited in MCO P1020.34G and MARADMIN 198/07 remain authorized. The order does not prohibit individual visible tattoos nor does it state that those tattoos need to be documented.

**Q8:** What role does the Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs (Manpower Management Division) have for review of questionable tattoos as they relate to retention and special duty assignments (SDA)?

**A8:** DC M&RA is the final adjudicating authority for any tattoo question involving SDAs and retention. This ensures equitable implementation of the policy and eliminates the possibility of multiple interpretations.

**Q9:** MARADMIN 198/07, paragraph 4, requires all Marines to be educated on the new policy - Specifically what should we be telling our Marines?

**A9:** Marines should be educated on the Commandant's intent for changing the policy as well as which tattoos are specifically prohibited. In addition, Marines are expected to fully understand the provisions of MCO P1020.34G and MARADMIN 198/07 before they make the conscious decision to obtain a new tattoo(s). Marines need to understand upfront the possible self-imposed career limitation they may have incurred as a result of tattooing (depending upon the nature of the tattoo i.e. content, size, location).

4. Endstate. All Marines fully understand the Marine Corps Tattoo Policy and make sound, educated decisions before obtaining a tattoo.

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